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REPORT ON AFRICA'S PREPARATIONS AND PARTICIPATION IN UNCTAD VIII

INTRODUCTION

1. This report is to be read in tandem with and as addendum to document E/ECA/CM.18/14 entitled "Report on Africa's preparations and participation in UNCTAD VIII". It highlights the broad policy orientations and discussions on the substantive agenda items of UNCTAD VIII. Observations from an African standpoint on each of the selected areas are included at the end. The assessment takes as point of departure the Lusaka Declaration [AF/MM/77(VII)/1] and the Teheran Final Document (TD/356)) of the Group of 77, it being assumed that both documents had been adopted with Cartagena de Indias as their target point.

2. The background leading to the eighth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD VIII), held is Cartagena de Indias, Colombia from 8 to 25 February 1992, is described in part in the earlier document (E/ECA/CM.18/14). Africa was fairly well-represented with about 18 delegations headed by Ministers. Assessment of the outcome of UNCTAD VIII is somehow constrained by new elements, in particular the observed departure from previous practice in the negotiation strategies. Important to note also was the absence of the usual resolutions. Some of the decisions taken at the session were predicated on the possible outcome of upcoming meetings and conferences, such as the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). Implementation of other decisions was contingent upon a restructured UNCTAD secretariat. It is perhaps too early to be categoric about certain likely implications on the economies of African countries, in particular.

3. The intention in this paper is to provide a general synopsis of the outcome of the Conference in terms of the extent to which the aspirations of developing countries in an interdependent world were addressed. It also focuses on the reaction of the developed countries, especially their renewed commitment to alleviating the developing countries's economic problems through the machinery of UNCTAD pursuant to United Nations General Assembly resolution 1995 (XIX) addressing trade and development issues of developing countries.

4. UNCTAD VIII, which should have been held in 1991, was postponed to 1992 because of difficulties encountered in finding a venue and fixing its timing. Furthermore, it took time to resolve among member States the Conference's agenda and the theme stressing the urgent need for better international cooperation and instruments to avoid the continued marginalization of vulnerable economies and populations in the face of internationalization and/or globalization of economies. The eighth session was preceded by a pre-conference of senior officials on 6 and 7 February 1992.

I. UNCTAD IN A CHANGING POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

5. Contrary to the outcome of previous UNCTAD sessions that often adopted resolutions or, as in the case of UNCTAD VII, the Final Act of UNCTAD VII (document TD/350), UNCTAD VIII concluded its deliberations by adopting a short "Declaration submitted by the President of the eighth session of the Conference" (document TD/L.340/Rev.1), a sort of chapeau acknowledging and stressing the need for UNCTAD to remain an international forum poised to play a highly significant role in the new partnership for economic development, a partnership based on commitment by all member States to engage in a continuous and constructive dialogue inspired by the need to achieve a more efficient and equitable world economy. The Declaration also stressed that the success of such a new partnership would be impossible unless nations avoided and overcame confrontation by fostering a climate of genuine cooperation and solidarity. At the same time, it recognized the importance of strengthening national and international policies as well as multilateral cooperation adapted to the new realities.

6. The Conference acknowledged that the international community faced an unprecedented conjunction of challenges and opportunities at the end of traditional political tensions. Prospects had improved for strengthening multilateral cooperation as a result of a broad tide of economic reforms, democratization processes, and the gathering momentum for respect for human rights. Also highlighted were some of the

risks that were likely to arise and intensify from economic, social, humanitarian and ecological problems which needed to be urgently addressed by the international community.

7. The Conference took note of the fact that despite considerable achievements made by some developing countries including vigorous growth, diversification of their economies, a majority, particularly the LDCs most of which are in Africa, were facing stagnation, poverty, crisis of considerable proportions due in part to their structural weaknesses. It was therefore agreed that global policy dialogue would bring about more generally shared perception of a development process. In this regard, national and international policy measures were considered prerequisites to realizing the full potential of interdependence for the transmission of positive impulses, cumulative benefits for development worldwide.

8. Against that background, broad policy orientations of each agenda item were discussed, frequent reference being made to the most important challenges for the 1990s, such as the elimination of poverty and acceleration of economic growth and social development of developing countries on sustainable long-term basis. With the demise of Group C, the former centrally planned economies, the group negotiating system had began to thaw, a trend which was contributed to partly by members of the Group of 77 (G.77) during the seventh Ministerial Meeting of G.77 when some Latin American countries sought greater flexibility and freedom in the negotiations to defend their respective national interests rather than being bound by the solidarity of G.77. Thus, at Cartagena de Indias, only Africa and remotely Asia but not the majority of Latin America, gave any credence to the common G.77 platform the Teheran Final Document. The waning of the spirit of group confrontation in UNCTAD negotiations was a positive sign to Group B and such countries as Israel that had disliked the G.77 stand. They considered it a major stumbling block against free and uninhibited international cooperation.

9. This apart, Group B countries devoted most of their efforts to discussing the agenda items linking them to required structural changes within UNCTAD itself. The trend set at UNCTAD VIII definitely establishes how UNCTAD will conduct its business in future. Certain issues may never again find a place in the UNCTAD forum since adoption of resolutions is not to be encouraged. Some of the UNCTAD's Permanent Committees have been abolished, while the work of others have been allocated to Working Groups of the Trade and Development Board (TDB). The following is a brief summary in respect of the substantive agenda item on strengthening national and international action and multilateral cooperation for a healthy, secure and equitable world economy (document TD/339 and Corr.1).

A. Resources for development

10. UNCTAD VIII underscored several external difficulties developing countries face in mobilizing, allocating and utilizing domestic resources to the maximum effect possible. It recognized that, in the absence of fast economic growth, substantial increase in overall savings was not feasible. It therefore attached particular attention to mobilization of external finance in the form of increased official flows, foreign direct investment and the search for solutions to debt problems and stressed the need to identify ways and means for increased supplementary external finance. However, the reaction of most donor industrialized countries tended to link the issue of increasing external financing to certain conditionalities such as economic needs and democratization in the recipient developing countries. Another important element regarding additional resource mobilization in the 1990s included their urge for resources to go towards environmental protection, taking into account the initial steps of the agreement on an Interim Multilateral Fund to assist countries signatories to the Montreal Protocol on Substances that deplete the Ozone Layers and on the Global Environmental Facility to provide grants or concessional loans to developing countries in support of environmental measures in their specific areas.

11. Measures and policies proposed at national levels included efforts by developing countries to achieve macro-economic stability and predictability that in turn required increased monetary control and greater financial discipline compatible with the competitiveness and institutional development of capital markets.

Countries were urged to introduce appropriate institutional reforms and sound national banking systems that could operate within the context of liberal and secure international financial systems.

12. Good governance, fight against corruption and improved allocation of resources by reducing excessive military expenditures in the development process were stressed. Hence, States were urged to ensure political stability and secure a predictable economic environment as an absolute pre-requisites for the proper functioning of the market and expansion of the private sector as well as for attracting foreign direct investment and for stemming capital flight. Public sector reforms were called for in order to improve mobilization and use of savings in the developing countries. Countries were urged to undertake fiscal policy reforms with a view to rationalizing and simplifying taxation without negating the revenue, equity and incentives principles; other non-debt-creating financial flows were recommended. The virtues of privatization as a liable option to fostering competition and efficiency were extolled. The Conference stressed that sound economic policies needed to be based on the interplay of market forces in order to stimulate entrepreneurship.

1. Debt

13. The issue of debt was very extensively debated during the session by Africa and other developing countries who adopted a consolidated stand on the basis of the Teheran Final Document. The debt crisis was highlighted in the context of debt owed to multilateral financial institutions and commercial banks. As debtors, they requested cancellation of all official bilateral debt of low-income countries. Some other developing countries toyed with the idea of introducing the concept of middle-income countries. The creditors insisted on continuing negotiations on a case-by-case basis. Furthermore, it became evident that those countries that had embarked on recognized economic adjustment stood to receive consideration for cancellation. Developed countries also indicated that LDCs would receive favourable consideration, with possible continuation of cancellation of their debts.

14. Nonetheless, the Conference called for serious attention to be given to growth-oriented solutions to the debt problems of developing countries, especially to alleviating the debt-servicing burden by, among others, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. By the same token, low-income countries undertaking economic reforms required the support of multilateral financial institutions in the form of new disbursements and concessional funds.

2. External finance for development

15. The Conference acknowledged that the process of structural adjustment in developing countries needed to be adequately supported and funded. It urged that associated macro-economic and structural policy conditions should take due account of specific economic needs and conditions of developing countries. Developed countries were again urged to attain the target of devoting 0.7 per cent of their GNP to ODA. Donors reaffirmed their commitment undertaken at the second United Nations Conference on LDCs to bring about significant external support to LDCs.

3. Environment and development finance

16. As briefly mentioned above, issues of environmental degradation are poised to receive priority in resource allocation. Donors pledged continued efforts to ensure that external resources available from both public and private sectors in addition to resources provided through bilateral and multilateral channels would be increased and used effectively and efficiently in this regard. Developing countries were urged to recognize and address their local environmental degradation. In this respect, appropriate additional financial resources would be made available to them as part of strengthening the newly found partnership. Debt conversion by debtor countries would also be conditional upon the protection of the environment.

17. To a large extent, a number of issues of concern articulated by Africa in the Lusaka Declaration and in the Teheran Final Document had been reiterated by the Conference, in particular, the objective of combating absolute poverty, promoting investment, human capital (particularly education and health), preservation of the environment, respect for human rights and stability as indispensable elements of a strategy that focuses on people. It also emphasized that the primary source of funding for development would remain developing countries' own savings. However, it became quite evident that capital was likely to be invested in countries where economic rules were clear, just and effectively enforced, without which it was pointless to hope for assistance from abroad and equally impossible to realize domestic potential.

B. International trade

18. The Conference fully recognized that the international trading environment had been affected by a number of developments which had created both challenges and opportunities. It therefore called for appropriate action like substantial concessions on market access with a view to promoting world trade, increasing opportunities for developing countries' exports; ongoing reform to GATT rules on agriculture to provide for secure access to markets for developing countries' exports; mitigation and compensation for negative impacts on net food importing developing countries; programme for phasing out the multifibre arrangement (MFA) and reintegrating trade in textiles and clothing into the rules and principles of GATT; and fullest possible liberalization of trade in tropical products on a non-reciprocal basis.

19. The Conference stressed that agreements on safeguards, anti-dumping and countervailing measures would impart stability and predictability to international trade; an agreement on trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights (TRIPs) would facilitate access by developing countries to technology and the pursuit of public policy and social objectives; a multilateral framework for trade in services would assist in enhancing the international competitiveness of developing country service firms and enable them to gain effective access to world markets by, inter alia, incorporating the MFN principle and universal coverage of the service sectors; an agreement on trade-related investment measures (TRIMs) would clearly recognize the right of developing countries to establish conditions for foreign investors intended to promote development and enhance competition; a legal structure for the implementation of the results of the Uruguay Round that precluded both unilateral action and cross-sectoral retaliation between trade in goods and measures relating to intellectual property protection, investment and services would be counter-productive. However, the Conference failed to arrive at a definitive position with regard to establishing a multilateral trade organization to implement the envisaged results of the ongoing discussions in the United Nations and in GATT on strengthening institutional arrangements.

1. Market access

20. While reaffirming that benefits of expanded international trade were unevenly distributed with few developing countries achieving appreciable growth in their exports, the Conference urged all countries to increase transparency of their trade regimes, halt and reverse protectionism and improve market access. Countries extending preferences were also urged to comply with multilaterally agreed principles of GSP whose objectives had still to be fulfilled.

21. In this regard, it is important to note that African countries have to a large extent already liberalized their trade, pursuant to certain imposed structural adjustment policies. Therefore Africa has very little or nothing at all to gain from further trade liberalization in view of some of the impediments posed by non-tariff barriers against its products, in particular in the area of textiles and clothing.

22. The strong hope that the Conference had on the successful outcome of Uruguay Round of Multilateral Trade Negotiations leaves much to be desired. Doubts have arisen because the current negotiated version of Uruguay Round has somehow deviated from the Punta del Este Declaration. The final

result could probably be neither expanded trade nor development possibilities for Africa, not to mention a lack of greater security and predictability.

2. Trade and environmental protection

23. Environmental protection, particularly by developing countries preserving their natural and ecological resources, was given prominence. The concern of developing countries forced by unfavourable conditions in international trade to feel obliged to maintain their export pattern through over-exploitation of their natural resources with a view to meeting development requirements was also discussed. In that regard, the Conference called for trade measures to be found to enforce environmental policies, principles and rules including domestic trade measures targeted to achieve certain environmental objectives.

24. Although environmental policies were proposed to deal with root causes of environmental degradation and to avoid environmental measures that restrict trade, the extent to which interaction between trade and environment policies is likely to be used will essentially underpin the African countries' development and trade that is resource-based. The application of principles of environmental policies to trade will no doubt cause unwarranted economic and social upheavals. It is important to note that while UNCTAD was urged to undertake research that clarifies the linkages between trade and environment, the Conference also accepted the concept that improved market access for developing countries' exports will be tied to sound environmental policies.

25. Within trade policy reforms, trade efficiency and facilitation were stressed. The effectiveness of new techniques and procedures capable of saving time and money in international trade transactions were duly recognized. For instance, trade facilitation strategies relating to electronic data interchange (EDI) that were already effectively improving trade efficiency needed to be expanded. Against that background, the Secretary-General of UNCTAD is required to initiate consultations with member States with a view to establishing an expert group on trade efficiency as one of the ad hoc working groups proposed within the new structure of the Trade and Development Board. The results thereof are to be submitted to an international symposium on trade efficiency in 1994.

3. Technology

26. The Conference reconfirmed the importance of technology in world trade, particularly trade in manufactures and services. The process of globalization of trade and economic prospects for technological change in developing countries would be determined by their ability to have access to modern technology, increase the capability to absorb and utilize it. The Conference stressed revitalization of investment flows and enhancement of its contribution to the development of developing countries that required increased capacity to absorb imported technology, improved infrastructure and, most important of all, educational standards and trained technicians.

27. Therefore several measures and actions both at national and international levels were called for. They included, at national level, expansion and adaptation of educational systems embracing vocational training; building up of scientific and technological research and development capabilities; and diffusion of technology within small- and medium-size companies in developing countries. At international level, developed countries were urged to facilitate unhindered access by developing countries to high, new and emerging technological know-how and to consider ways and means of facilitating technology cooperation with developing countries, including means of encouraging technology flows to developing countries, public guarantee schemes to promote joint ventures, licensing agreements and research and development collaboration agreements.

28. With regard to the negotiations on an international code of conduct on transfer of technology, the Conference concluded that conditions did not exist to reach full agreement on outstanding issues. UNCTAD was therefore urged to continue its work on facilitating an agreement.

29. A major constraint is that the schemes are on commercial basis which, for a majority of African countries, puts them out of reach. Similarly, it is possible to conclude that multilateral commitments and policy actions including financial assistance on concessional terms to promote training as well as acquisition and transfer of technology to build developing countries' technological and human capabilities failed to get consensus acceptance. Therefore technology will continue to be transferred on commercial and country-by-country basis by mutual agreement.

4. Services

30. The Conference recognized the strategic significance of services in the development process and the dominance of developed countries' firms in world trade in services in total contrast to developing countries whose economies were characterized by inability to build up competitive capacity in this area. The Conference therefore urged increased participation by developing countries in trade in services in order to enable them to benefit from their comparative advantages in the services sector.

31. As reflected in the Lusaka Declaration (paras. 85-91), developing countries had requested preferential market access for their service exports, including through temporary movement of labour for supply of service. In this regard and in order to assist developing countries to overcome handicaps in the field of trade in services, the Conference urged UNCTAD, in collaboration with other United Nations agencies dealing with services, to continue promoting mutually beneficial cooperation with a view to promoting environmentally friendly services and enhancing the contribution of services to their sustainable development. In this respect, the Conference defined the work programme of the UNCTAD secretariat, emphasizing that its orientation was to provide the focus for the evolution that enabled the services sector to contribute to the development process.

32. Maritime transport service being of crucial importance, the Conference welcomed the work of UNCTAD in this field. It also acknowledged that effective participation in shipping by a number of countries had been affected by structural and technological changes within the sector. While international shipping policy is based on the equality of all maritime partners, insistence by the African delegations that as a region it be given special attention did not yield much, except for the Conference's call upon UNCTAD to continue to provide technical assistance to developing countries on a bilateral, subregional and/or regional basis in the field of maritime transport. It remains to be seen how the new structure of the UNCTAD secretariat will cope with the mandates on the United Nations Convention on the Code of Conduct for Liner Conferences and other services.

33. It is perhaps worth mentioning, in conclusion, that the developed countries have managed to create, control and retain within their borders services which constitute not only the highest value-added segment but also most strategic in character, for instance innovation, research and development, strategic planning, design and engineering. Moreover, they control marketing and distribution thereof and thus continue to increase the gap with the developing countries in terms of competitiveness in international trade. It is imperative therefore for developing countries and Africa in particular to strengthen the services sector and increase its participation. To a large extent, this could be dependent upon successful improvement in the latter's position in the international division of labour.

34. Needless to say, Africa is disadvantaged by having a less developed industrial base whose structures are not integrated. These factors have combined to hinder spontaneous development of producer services and no doubt put Africa at a further disadvantage in the international chain of value-added. Therefore,

liberalization of trade in services could exacerbate Africa's problems because of a lack of mechanism capable of stopping such a thing from happening.

5. Commodities

35. World commodity trade in the 1980s was characterized by low and declining real prices in international markets. The adverse effects of these trends resulted in substantial contraction in export earnings, especially for countries of the third world dependent on export of commodities. Future prospects could be constrained by slow economic growth and the declining rate of raw material usage per unit of GDP, especially in the industrialized countries. The suspension of the operation of international commodity agreements (ICAs), coupled with a decline in total world share of developing countries because the developed countries expanded their export share, created severe balance-of-payment difficulties for most developing countries. The Conference therefore acknowledged that solutions to the problems facing commodities, including average world market prices which had fluctuated around historic low levels, could only take effect with increased diversification, local processing and greater market access.

36. Some of the agreed solutions to the problems in the commodity field needed to be sound, compatible and consistent at national and international levels with policies that also bore in mind the broad aims of the Integrated Programme for Commodities. The Conference stressed that cooperation in international commodity trade required to be strengthened, that existing mechanisms for compensatory financing needed to be reviewed in the light of new developments and, where possible, new ones needed to be established.

37. Views converged on elimination of poverty within an interdependent world with the creation of a supportive framework towards this objective. In this regard, the Conference called for concerted efforts on the part of the governments of developed countries and relevant international organizations to support national commodity policies of developing countries, including providing adequate and appropriate financial and technical cooperation for commodity development. While reaffirming the need for improved flow of technology to developing countries with a view to lowering dependency on commodity trade in the process of economic development, it was also noted that the transfer of technology would be based on commercial terms agreed upon between the parties concerned.

38. The Conference agreed on the urgent need to achieve improved market access conditions for commodities through progressive removal of barriers to imports of primary commodity products, processed, semi-processed or finished products. However, the consensus reached regarding calling for the dismantling of all barriers on processed products and elimination of policies that induce uncompetitive production such as subsidies on production and exports was non-committal. Like most conclusions of the Conference, the issue of improved market access was made conditional to successful conclusion of the Uruguay Round of Multilateral Trade Negotiations.

39. However, the Conference agreed for support measures to be directed towards efforts aimed at institution building, promoting entrepreneurship, horizontal diversification and crop substitution, increased participation by developing countries in processing, marketing and distribution. It also affirmed that adequate official bilateral and multilateral resources, including private investment, was needed to finance diversification projects and programmes and the promotion and development of resource-based industries, as well as commodity-related services activities, possibly through special facilities for these purposes.

40. In this regard, the Conference welcomed the decision of the General Assembly in resolution 46/151 concerning support for the diversification of the African economies.

41. Producers and consumers of individual commodities were urged to examine ways and means of reinforcing and improving their cooperation in order to contribute to the solution of problems in the commodity area, taking fully into account the particular characteristics and situation of each individual

commodity. The Conference also called for the pursuance of substantive negotiations between producers and consumers with a view to achieving viable and more efficient international agreements. Similarly, in situations of large stock overhangs, account of market trends and arrangements as well as the findings of study groups had to be taken.

42. Turning to the issue of the C. mmon Fund for Commodities whose coming into operation was welcomed, the Conference urged max .num participation by all and that its resources had to be fully exploited. The Conference called for an increase in resources to the Second Account of the Common Fund as well as to ensure that the Account became fully operational as soon as possible and that its benefits reached the least developed countries and commodities of interest to developing countries, especially those of small produce exporters.

43. From the African standpoint, the recognition by the Conference of other equally important aspects is worth mentioning. These included commodity-related shortfalls in export earnings of developing countries, continuance and preservation for beneficiaries, compensation financing mechanisms, namely the IMF CCFF, the ACP-EEC STABEX and SYSMIN schemes of the Lome Convention, the EEC scheme for non-ACP least developed countries and the Swiss scheme. The Conference concluded discussion by inviting other countries to consider introducing similar schemes.

II. CONCLUDING GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

44. The Conference went into session under a lot of uncertainty, first, because of the many brackets to the texts that were tabled; second, the waning spirit of solidarity within the Group of 77 coupled with the disappearance of Group C as an identifiable power bloc in the UNCTAD negotiating structure; and third, the seeming insistence by certain Group B countries to radically reduce the role of UNCTAD.

45. Perhaps some of the profound changes witnessed by the world at large and the ensuing new spirit of international cooperation renewed the interest of the majority of the delegations in the relevance of UNCTAD. Thus, statement after statement made in plenary and summarized in the report of the Conference attested to the emergence of a new sense of partnership for development among member States and stressed that UNCTAD was poised to make a major contribution. However, some of the proposed solutions to problems were predicated on decisions taken in other fora.

46. The Conference had much going for it in terms of what it was able to agree upon such as interrelated issues of trade, sustainable development, environmental protection, environmentally sound technology and better natural resource management. It also attached high priority to acceleration of development that is environmentally sound and sustainable. Furthermore, it sought the enhancement of the well-being of today's generation while preserving the capacity of future generations to meet their own needs. It is in this regard that it welcomed the holding of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992 and transmitted a message (document TD/L.341/Rev.1) expressing the high importance it attached to UNCED and reaffirmed that a revitalized UNCTAD could contribute to the implementation of the action programmes of UNCED.

47. Despite the initial uncertainty regarding UNCTAD's future, it was generally agreed that UNCTAD needed urgent adaptation and revitalization to enable it to seize the new opportunities of fostering international cooperation for development, pursuant to its mandate as enunciated in resolution 1995 (XIX). The Conference reaffirmed UNCTAD as the principal organ of the United Nations in the field of trade and development. The Conference also reiterated that it was a most appropriate focal point for the integrated treatment of development and interrelated issues in such key areas as trade, finance, investment, services and technology for the interests of all countries, particularly developing countries. It adopted certain changes to the UNCTAD structure with a view to enabling it to respond better and more effectively to the needs of its member States.

48. Of particular interest to Africa was the proposal to consider convening a world conference on commodities (document TD/L.342) the main objective of which would be to bring together producers and consumers with marketing enterprises and other market actors under the auspices of UNCTAD. Some of the views expressed in the corridors touched on the possible danger of marginalizing efforts already initiated to revive certain international commodity agreements. The Conference therefore requested the Standing Committee on Commodities, through the Trade and Development Board, to undertake a comprehensive analysis and to accordingly advise and invite the General Assembly of the United Nations to convene a world conference on commodities under UNCTAD auspices.

49. In the light of the above brief summary, required follow-up action at individual country and regional level as well as at secretariat level needs to be stressed. At national and regional level, what is important is the likely total different approach needed in future participation. In other words, Africa must reconsider its reliance on the strategy of G.77 solidarity and how, as individual countries and/or as a region, to respond to a restructured UNCTAD mechanism.

50. On the other hand, the ECA secretariat will also need to re-examine its work programme taking into account previous experiences, including collaboration with other secretariats to see how best to accommodate many of the decisions taken at UNCTAD VIII in terms of better delivery of its technical assistance to and backstopping of member States. This will perhaps not be difficult if the twenty-seventh session of the Commission/eighteenth meeting of the Conference of Ministers were to approve the secretariat's proposals contained in the document entitled "The Economic Commission for Africa in the 1990s: A policy and management framework for facing Africa's development challenges" (E/ECA/CM.18/4).